

Responsive Management



WASHINGTON STATE PARKS CENTENNIAL 2013 SURVEY

**Conducted for the
Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission
by Responsive Management**

2006

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted for the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission to determine residents' use of State Parks and facilities, their opinions on State Park management and funding, their ratings of State Parks, their awareness of and support of the Centennial 2013 Plan, and their participation in camping and use of recreational vehicles. The study entailed a telephone survey of Washington State residents 18 years old and older. Interviews were conducted Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., Saturday noon to 5:00 p.m., and Sunday from 5:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., local time. The survey was conducted in January 2006. Responsive Management obtained a total of 1,204 completed interviews.

The software used for data collection was Questionnaire Programming Language 4.1. The analysis of data was performed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software as well as proprietary software developed by Responsive Management. Throughout this report, findings of the telephone survey are reported at a 95% confidence interval. For the entire sample of Washington State residents, the sampling error is at most plus or minus 2.82 percentage points.

VISITATION OF STATE PARKS

- Slightly more than half of Washington residents have visited a State Park within the past 2 years. (Hereinafter, the report refers to these people as "State Park visitors.") Although the data show that most visits are day-use visits, nearly half of State Park visitors have stayed overnight at some time in the past 2 years. Some of the most commonly visited State Parks include Deception Pass State Park, Riverside State Park, and Ocean City State Park.
- About half of State Park visitors said that their last visit to a State Park was in the summer. Note that the survey was administered in January 2006, meaning that the timing of the survey would bias answers away from spring.
- State Park visitors appear to like variety, as a large majority of State Park visitors usually visit different parks rather than the same park.

USE OF STATE PARK FACILITIES

- Just under half of all State Park visitors have stayed overnight in a Washington State Park in the past 2 years, and tents and RVs are the most popular facilities for overnight sleeping in Washington State Parks. Out of all respondents, about a quarter have stayed overnight in a Washington State Park.
- About one in ten overnight State Park visitors have rented a one-room cabin in a Washington State Park.
- An overwhelming majority of State Park visitors have used a comfort station at a Washington State Park.

INTEREST IN USING VARIOUS STATE PARK FACILITIES

- Interest is fairly high for renting a one-room cabin in a Washington State Park or a room in a lodge, with majorities of Washington residents expressing at least some interest in each; about a quarter are *very* interested in each.
- Washington residents were asked about their interest in participating in a State Park activity package, and a majority express interest, with about a quarter being *very* interested.
 - Majorities of those who expressed interest in a State Park activity package would be interested in on-site tours of 2 to 4 hours in length, organized trips for a full day, or weekend workshops with an overnight stay.

MOTIVATIONS FOR AND CONSTRAINTS TO VISITING STATE PARKS

- Washington State Park visitors were asked about eight potential reasons for visiting State Parks. The top reasons, based on a ranking of the percentages saying that the reasons are *very* important, are enjoying nature and the outdoors; getting away, stress reduction, or relaxation; spending time with family and friends; and being active and healthy. Note that these are *not* utilitarian reasons, for the most part, but relate to naturalistic experiences.
 - Four reasons—all largely utilitarian reasons—had markedly lower percentages saying that they are *very* important (less than a majority in each case).

- In a question that relates to the above findings on reasons for visiting a State Park, two-thirds of overnight State Park visitors said that the State Park that they visited was their primary destination. Again, this points out that most motivations for visiting State Parks are *not* utilitarian.
- Overnight campers (either in or out of a State Park) were asked about the importance of four campsite utilities: water is the most important by far, distantly followed by sewer and electricity. A very low percentage said that Internet access is *very* important.
- State Park visitors were asked about factors that influence their decision of which park to visit, and the top answer was that the respondent picks the same park he/she always goes to. Otherwise, location is the most important factor, followed by passing the park while traveling.
- Those State Park visitors who indicated that they usually visit the same State Park were asked if receiving information about a different State Park would motivate them to visit a different State Park, and three-quarters said that they would be likely to visit a different State Park.
- Lack of time was the most common reason for not visiting a State Park among those who did not visit one, followed by age/health and lack of interest; a very small percentage indicated that the parking fee was their reason for not visiting a State Park. Of those who did not visit a State Park, about a quarter indicated that there was something the Commission could do that would encourage them to visit a State Park, most commonly saying that the Commission could eliminate the parking fee, provide more information and outreach, or make more facilities or otherwise improve facilities (note that because the latter question is a small subset of the entire sample—those who did not visit a State Park *and* who said the Commission could do something—only a very small percentage of respondents who did not visit a State Park said that elimination of the parking fee would encourage them to visit a State Park).

- State Park visitors were about evenly split regarding whether gas prices had influenced the number of trips they took or the distance they were willing to travel in the previous 2 years: just over half agreed that gas prices did influence them, but just under half disagreed. This question appears to be highly polarized, as most agreement was strong agreement and most disagreement was strong disagreement.
- Regarding whether State Park comfort stations are an incentive or a disincentive to State Park visits, the overwhelming majority of State Park visitors who used a comfort station said that comfort stations did *not* influence their decisions to visit or not visit a State Park. A very small percentage said that comfort stations were a disincentive to their visiting a State Park.
 - A new design for a comfort station was described to these same respondents (the new design has six or more private, locking “family bathrooms” that are more like home bathrooms), and they were asked if comfort stations with the new design would make them more or less likely to visit a State Park, and about half said that the new comfort stations would make them more likely to visit a State Park.
- The majority of Washington residents disagree that the parking fee has had an impact on how often they visited State Parks (60%, with most of those saying that they *strongly* disagree). Nonetheless, about a third (34%) agree that the parking fee has had an impact on their frequency of visitation. Most of those who agree say that they visit State Parks less often because of the parking fee (out of all residents, 27% say they visit State Parks less often because of the parking fee).

SAFETY AT STATE PARKS

- Safety is not a problem at Washington State Parks, as visitors overwhelmingly feel safe.

PLANNING OF STATE PARK VISITS

- Visits to Washington State Parks are about evenly split between spontaneous visits and planned visits.
 - Those who planned their visit (at least in part) most commonly said that the planning was several months in advance.

- Most commonly, a spouse or friend suggested the State Park visit and did most of the planning for the visit (excluding those who said that they themselves had personally suggested and/or planned the visit).
- State Park visitors were asked about factors that influence their decision of which park to visit, and the top answer was that the respondent picks the same park he/she always goes to. Otherwise, location is the most important factor, followed by passing the park while traveling.

VISITATION AND CAMPING IN FACILITIES OTHER THAN STATE PARKS

- Those who did not visit a State Park in the past 2 years were asked about visitation at other parks, and about a quarter had visited another park (not including neighborhood parks).
- Washington residents were asked about their overnight camping at private campgrounds or locations other than State Parks, and a large majority of them do not camp at private campgrounds or locations other than State Parks; however, about one in five camp in private campgrounds, and slightly fewer camp in other locations not in State Parks.
- Those who had camped at a private campground or any other location that was *not* a State Park were asked if they had ever stayed in an RV in such a campground, and just more than half had done so.
- Just under half of Washington residents said that they had access to private lands for outdoor recreation, such as a farm or a vacation home or through friends or family.

CAMPING IN RECREATIONAL VEHICLES: TYPES OF RVs OWNED AND USED

- Almost one in five Washington residents own an RV. The most popular types of RV are trailers/5th wheels and motor homes.

- Those who own an RV and/or have camped in an RV but have not camped in a Washington State Park in an RV were asked for their reasons for not RV camping in a State Park, and they most commonly cited time or costs.

RATINGS OF STATE PARKS FACILITIES AND SERVICES

- Washington residents are, for the most part, satisfied with Washington State Parks: about half are *very* satisfied, and another third are *somewhat* satisfied. Results are similar regarding satisfaction with State Park employees and State Park facilities.
- State Park visitors and overnight visitors were asked to rate (using a school grading system) State Parks and various facilities that they had used.
 - In general, overnight facilities received high grades: majorities gave a grade of A (encompassing A+, A, and A-) to the yurt, cabin, or platform tent and to the one-room cabin in which they had stayed overnight. Also with fairly high grades overall were tent sites, facilities and services in general for overnight visits, and RV sites.
 - Unfortunately, the lowest ranked items were the overall satisfaction with the quality of facilities at State Parks and the overall satisfaction with Washington State Parks, although both of these questions had high percentages of “don’t know” answers.
 - The good news is that in looking at means, all ten of the items that were rated received a mean grade of B or better. In looking just at the overnight sleeping facilities, all of them (for which enough respondents answered the question) received a mean grade of B+ or better.
- Washington State Parks compare favorably to private campgrounds among those who have stayed overnight in both types of campgrounds, with the most common answer being that their experiences at both types of campgrounds are about the same. Otherwise, they are closely split between “better” and “worse” answers.

STEWARDSHIP OF STATE PARKS AND THEIR NATURAL RESOURCES

- Although the overwhelming majority of Washington residents have *not* volunteered or participated in a service project to benefit a State Park, nearly one in ten have done so. Additionally, just more than one in ten have donated money to benefit a State Park.

PUBLIC SERVICE: IMPORTANCE OF AND RATINGS OF MANAGEMENT OF STATE PARKS

- Washington residents were asked if they agree or disagree that the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission does a good job of managing the State Park system. Ratings are highly positive (particularly in light of the fact that residents more often think the system is not adequately funded than think it is adequately funded): nearly three-quarters agree that the Commission does a good job.
- Washington residents were asked about their agreement or disagreement regarding whether the Commission takes good care of its natural and cultural resources, and the results are highly positive: nearly four out of five agree that the Commission takes good care of its natural and cultural resources.
- Washington residents were asked if they agree or disagree that the Washington State Park system is adequately funded. While most commonly they do not know, they otherwise more often disagree than agree that the system is adequately funded.
- Washington residents were asked if they agree or disagree that the Washington State Park system spends taxpayer money wisely, and ratings are fairly positive: half agree that the system spends taxpayer money wisely, while more than a third do not know, leaving only about one in seven disagreeing that the system spends taxpayer money wisely.
- The six goals of the Centennial 2013 Plan were read to the respondents, and they were asked to rate the importance of each goal. The top goals, ranked by the percentage who said the goals are *very* important, are that citizens should be confident that their tax money is being used wisely and that citizens have safe and modern parks.

- The lowest ranked goals are that citizens should be able to connect with Washington's heritage and pursue personal health and that citizens help improve their State Parks and recreation.

PARTICIPATING IN PARK ACTIVITY PACKAGES AND LEARNING ABOUT THE ICE AGE FLOODS

- Washington residents were asked about their interest in participating in a State Park activity package, and a majority express interest.
- About two in five Washington residents had heard, prior to the survey, of the Ice Age Floods, also known as the Missoula Floods.
 - Interest in a State Park activity package teaching more about the Ice Age Floods is moderate: about half say that they are interested, but most of those who are interested are only *somewhat* interested.

FUNDING FOR STATE PARKS

- Washington residents were asked if they agree or disagree that the Washington State Park system is adequately funded. While most commonly they do not know, they otherwise more often disagree than agree that the system is adequately funded.
 - In a related question, Washington residents overwhelmingly agree that having a well-funded State Park system is important to the quality of life in Washington.
- Washington residents were asked about four funding options, if a change to State Park funding were made. For the most part, they do not want less spending on parks, nor do they want some parks closed. Instead, they prefer a voluntary fee of up to \$10 on annual license plate renewals or a state tax increase.
- Washington residents overwhelmingly think that having the state legislature set aside funding for buying new land for parks is important, and they feel even more strongly about having the state legislature set aside funds for needed repairs to existing parks.

- Washington residents were asked if they agree or disagree that the Washington State Park system spends taxpayer money wisely, and ratings are fairly positive: half agree that the system spends taxpayer money wisely, while more than a third do not know, leaving only about one in seven disagreeing that the system spends taxpayer money wisely.

DAILY PARKING FEES AND ANNUAL PASSES

- About two-thirds of State Park visitors paid the daily parking fee on their last day-use visit, while just under one in ten had an annual pass.
- Although the majority of Washington residents say that the \$5 daily parking fee is about the right amount, about a third say it is too high. The question about the price of the \$50 annual pass had similar results.
- The majority of Washington residents disagree that the parking fee has had an impact on how often they visit State Parks. Nonetheless, about a third agree that the parking fee has had an impact on their frequency of visitation, most commonly saying that it made them go less often.

OPINIONS ON PARTNERSHIPS FOR STATE PARKS

- There is a fairly high level of support—more than two-thirds—among Washington residents for a State Park funding plan that includes private or corporate financial support.
- A majority of Washington residents say that their view of a business that sponsored a Washington State Park would be more favorable because of the sponsorship.

WILLINGNESS TO PAY FOR CABINS

- An analysis was run of the willingness to pay for a cabin among those who previously said that they would be very or somewhat interested in renting a cabin in a Washington State Park. The survey asked about four types of cabins (one-room cabin with a kitchenette; a cabin with a kitchenette and a restroom with a toilet and sink; a cabin with a kitchenette, a restroom with a toilet and sink, and a private bedroom; and a cabin with a kitchen, a full

bathroom with shower, and two private bedrooms). Only the most deluxe offering of amenities (i.e., a cabin with a kitchen, a full bathroom with shower, and two private bedrooms) significantly increases the value that respondents place on the cabin. Furthermore, regardless of amenities, the maximum revenue will be gained by pricing the cabins at approximately \$41. At a lower price, more people may rent, but overall revenue is lower because the price per person is lower; at a higher price, fewer people will rent the cabin, resulting in lower revenue.

AWARENESS OF AND SUPPORT FOR THE COMMISSION'S CENTENNIAL 2013 PLAN

- Awareness of the Commission's Centennial 2013 Plan is quite low: just over one in twenty said that they were aware of the Plan prior to the survey.
- Support for the Centennial 2013 Plan is high among those who were aware of it prior to the survey; opposition is very low. These results hold among all respondents after the goals of the Plan are explained to them, with almost no opposition to the Plan.
 - Opposition is most commonly because of concerns about a potential tax increase that would result from the Plan or that money can be better spent.
- The six goals of the Centennial 2013 Plan were read to the respondents, and they were asked to rate the importance of each goal. The top goals, ranked by the percentages who said the goals are *very* important, are that citizens should be confident that their tax money is being used wisely and that citizens have safe and modern parks.
 - The lowest ranked goals are that citizens should be able to connect with Washington's heritage and pursue personal health and that citizens help improve their State Parks and recreation.

VOTING BEHAVIORS

- A very large majority of Washington residents say that they are registered to vote and that they voted in the 2004 Presidential election.